

Knaggs Bridge (Cole Road Bridge)
Spanning the Shiawassee River on Cole Road
Bancroft vicinity
Shiawassee County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-29

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Mid-Atlantic Region
National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Knaggs Bridge
(Cole Road Bridge)

HAER No. MI-29

Location: Spanning the Shiawassee River on Cole Road in the South East quarter of Shiawassee County, approximately 1-1/2 miles south of the village of Bancroft, Section 6, T5N-R4E, Township of Burns, Shiawassee County, Michigan

UTM: 16.2080400.496500
Quad: Corunna South East

Date of Construction: 1893; rehabilitated in 1943

Builder: King Bridge Company of Cleveland, Ohio

Present Owner: Shiawassee County Road Commission
112 E. McArthur Street
Corunna, Michigan 48817

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: The Knaggs Bridge (Cole Road Bridge) is the second oldest known surviving example of the nationally famous King Bridge Company's work in Michigan, on which they have data. The bridge company was the second most prolific metal truss bridge builder in Michigan in the 19th century. The existing structure is a single span, through Pratt truss, having eight panels at 16 feet, 3/4 inch, for a total span length of 128 feet 6 inches, center to center of pines. A determination of eligibility has been received from the National Register.

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken in January 1988 in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement by the Shiawassee County Road Commission, in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration as a mitigative measure prior to removal and replacement of the bridge.

Compiler: Gerald H. Streichert, P. E.
Construction Engineer
Shiawassee County Road Commission
Corunna, Michigan

Cole Road is a county primary road located in the South East quarter of Shiawassee County, approximately 1-1/2 miles south of the village of Bancroft. It runs generally in an east-west direction between Bancroft Road and Byron Road. The first known bridge in this area was built in 1838 and was constructed of wood. The structure remained in place for 55 years.

The Knaggs Bridge (Cole Road Bridge) area has been designated as a historic site (registered Local Historic Site Number 32). On the southeast side of the bridge, a marker was erected in 1963 that summarizes the historic importance of the area. The marker reads:

"Archaeological evidence indicates men lived in this area before the time of Christ. Chippewa Indians settled here sometime before 1790. Their village was called Kechewankaugoning, which is said to mean 'Big Salt Lick.' This was the birthplace of Okemos and the summer residence of Wasso, two of Michigan's best known Indian chiefs. Henry Bolieu, a trader, the first white settler, built a cabin here on the Shiawassee River about 1817. When an Indian reservation was created in 1819, Peter Whitmore Knaggs built a trading post here, which he maintained for several years. Later a relative, John Knaggs, operated a store and tavern at the same site until 1829. A bridge was first built here in 1838. In 1850, the reservation was opened to settlement. A dam, the remains of which can be seen, was built in 1856."

The subject structure built in 1893 is a single span, through Pratt truss, having 8 panels at 16 feet 3/4 inch, for a total span length of 128 feet 6 inches, center to center of pins. The height of the truss is 16 feet. The original deck consisted of heavy oak planking with a clear roadway of 15 feet 4 inches and an overall width of 16 feet 5 inches. The deck was carried on 8 lines of 10WF21 stringers. The original floor beams were built up from plates and angles. When the bridge was reconditioned in 1943, the floor beams were deepened to provide bearings for the undertrussing rods, and the timber deck was replaced with a 5-inch reinforced concrete floor slab. At that time, many of the truss members were reinforced. Information, such as plans, drawings and other data pertaining to the development and construction of the Knaggs Bridge, were not available.

Clearly, the Knaggs Bridge area has been a focus of human activity in both prehistoric and historic times. Information about the prehistoric period in the region consists mainly of artifact collections made by local residents and avocational archaeologists.

Evidence from collections and observations indicates that the Knaggs Bridge region has seen human activity from the Paleo-Indian period through the late Woodland period. Fluted points, artifacts diagnostic of the Paleo-Indian period, have been found in the area, as have the remains of at least one

mammoth. Though there was not necessarily an association between the Paleo-Indians at Knaggs Bridge and this extinct elephant, it is interesting that they both were there at roughly the same time. In Michigan, Paleo-Indians are known to have hunted barren ground caribou (Cleveland, 1965), thus underscoring the fact that the post-glacial environment inhabited by Paleo-Indian peoples in Michigan, included food animals that are absent from the region today.

The discovery of fluted points at Knaggs Bridge implies that hunting was one activity carried out by prehistoric peoples, dating from the earliest human occupancy of the area. Photographs of artifact collections maintained at the Michigan Bureau of History depict projectile points from the later periods as well. So, there is a consistent pattern of prehistoric hunting in the region.

Additionally, comparable use of the headwaters of Michigan rivers for hunting is indicated in other river basins. In particular, the headwaters region of the nearby Looking Glass River have a large number of sites overlooking marshlands. These low density sites yield artifacts that are commonly associated with hunting (Lovis et al., 1980). It is thus to be expected that hunting may have been important on the headwaters of the Shiawassee River, where environmental settings are similar to those of the Looking Glass. It has been hypothesized that headwater environments were attractive to hunters, not only because game was present, but because the environment was more stable than in other areas of Michigan, where post-glacial environmental changes were of a greater magnitude (Lovis et al., 1980).

Hunting, however, was not the only prehistoric activity at the Knaggs Bridge area, though it probably was always important. A ground slate spearpoint (or bayonet) from the Durling site to the north of the present bridge and on the west side of the river is as likely to have served a ceremonial or ritual function as a hunting function (Thompson, 1985). This artifact seems to be finished at the point end. The base is either unfinished or the haft element consisted of a natural tapering of the material that served the same purpose as a formally manufactured haft (Holman et al., 1986). Slate points are relatively rare in Michigan. A recent report of a slate point (or bayonet) from the Saginaw Valley notes that this artifact is similar in style and material to slate points found in Late Archaic burials in Maine, that date from 3200 B.C. to 1800 B.C. (Thompson, 1985: 53-63). The slate point from the Durling site probably dates to the Late Archaic as well. Though it was not associated with a burial, its size and shape do not appear to make it functional as a weapon (Holman et al., 1986).

Some artifacts from sites in the general area of Knaggs Bridge were collected by Mr. Frank Mortimer of the Michigan Archaeological Society. Mr. Mortimer's collection is in the Michigan State University Museum, along with relevant correspondence. Mr. Mortimer contacted Dr. Charles E. Cleveland of the museum and took Dr. Cleveland to the Durling property, 20SE24, on the west side of the

river at Knaggs Bridge on one occasion in about 1973. Dr. Cleveland recalls that artifact density at the Durling site at that time was relatively low (personal communication, 1986).

Members of the Shiawassee County Historical Society who live in the Knaggs Bridge area and farm the land there were extremely helpful in making information available. Those individuals included Helen Cole, Margaret Zudnic and Mr. and Mrs. Durling. Ms. Zudnic supplied copies of an early map of the Knaggs Bridge area as it looked in 1877 (Figure 1). This map was drawn from memory by Mr. Edwin Gulick. Excerpts from historic reference about Knaggs Bridge were compiled by Mr. Birt Durling of the Central Michigan Chapter (now Upper Grand Valley Chapter) of the Michigan Archaeological Society, in about 1958. These, plus site forms from a chapter survey of Shiawassee County, were deposited in the Michigan Archaeological Society archives maintained at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology. Copies of Durling's report are on file in the Michigan State University Museum, and at least some of this material is in the site files maintained by the Michigan Bureau of History. The referenced works are available in the Michigan State University library, the State of Michigan library and the Shiawassee County Historical Society Archives.

The Knaggs Bridge community is located at the crossroads of former trails that came together from different directions at a ford at the foot of Knaggs Hill, about 1/10 mile to the north of the current bridge (Hinsdale, 1931; Emmert, 1963). The headwaters of the Shiawassee River here form a navigable stream, with tributaries that provide an avenue to the Saginaw Valley northeast of Knaggs Bridge and to the nearby Looking Glass River, which drains into the Grand River to the west. This location then served as a crossroads for people traveling by land and/or by water to destinations in various parts of the State. The Knaggs Bridge area was included in 3,000 acres of land reserved for Chippewa peoples by the terms of the Treaty of Saginaw in 1819. This treaty was negotiated by Lewis Cass who, as Governor of the Michigan Territory, acted on behalf of the United States. The aim of the treaty was to secure land in the Saginaw Valley and thus open it to American settlement.

A bridge was first built here in 1838, and the Knaggs Bridge area was opened to American settlers in 1850. Movement of settlers to the interior of the lower peninsula occurred later than settlement in the coastal regions. The kinds of locations where communities formed in the interior are exemplified by the development of the Knaggs Bridge, Byron, Bancroft, Morrice and Vernon areas. The construction of the more modern Knaggs Bridge in 1893 served as a major link in tying these communities together. As the area developed, farming became the major industry. The Knaggs Bridge helped to promote the economic base in the area by connecting existing transportation networks, thus providing more adequate farm to market travel. Interior communities, such as the Knaggs Bridge area, became central places that served local needs, by

establishing saw mills, woolen mills, grist mills, blacksmith shops and tanneries. Thus, these communities were able to provide necessary services and natural resources to isolated early settlers.

From the early 1900s until present day, the Knaggs Bridge has played an important role in the transportation network, in that it provided access to not only the surrounding local communities, but also to the more industrialized areas of Flint and Lansing, Michigan, which lie 20 miles to the northeast and 30 miles to the southwest, respectively.

Sources of Information

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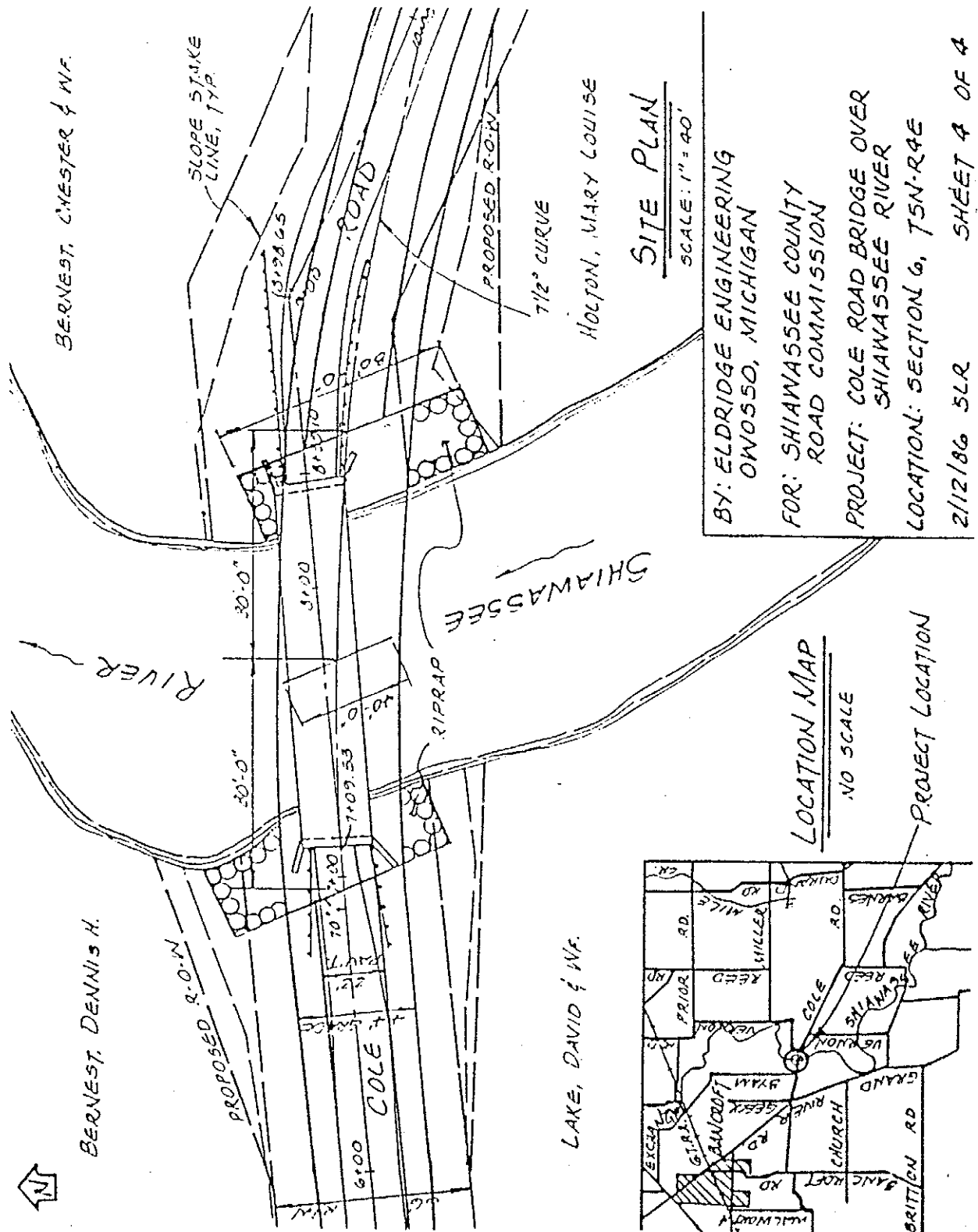
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REPRODUCTION
OF A SKETCH OF
THE ANGELES BRIDGE
AREA AS DRAWN BY
EDWIN J. GULICK

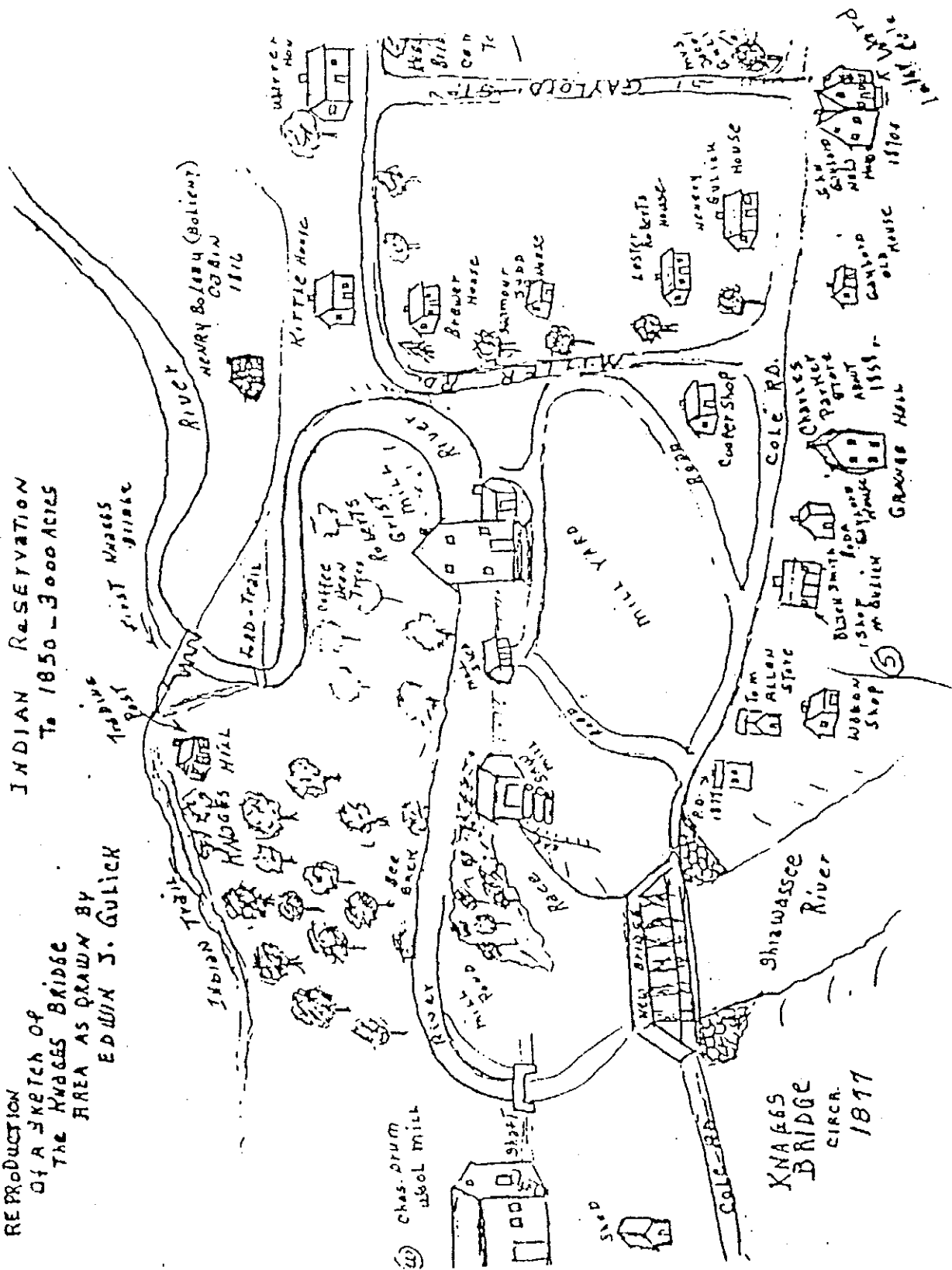


Figure I